



The Ethnomedical Practices of the Keetoowah traditional Cherokees: Current Clinical Implications

University of Bridgeport Seed Grant Award

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Abstract Keetoowah Cherokee medicine has never been documented, and the Western Band of Cherokees (Tahlequah, OK) have kept the traditions of the Keetoowahs through the bloodline of Redbird Smith. Crosslin F. Smith is the grandson of Redbird, and a well respected and international educator and practitioner of traditional Keetoowah Cherokee Medicine. Dr. Noé has been practicing Cherokee Medicine under Elder Smith's tutelage for 25 years. In Elder Smith's practice (Vian, OK) he treats native peoples with plants, rituals and prayers for such diseases as cancer without any western medicine applications (many native peoples refusing any western medical care). This research project is to collect botanical specimen that are used by Elder Smith and from the sites he collects from in OK. The collection is housed at UBCNM's new Medicinal Plant Herbarium. The new Herbarium is housed on the 6th floor of the HSC building, room 608. The University of Bridgeport Seed Grant Award financed the herbarium equipment, botanical field equipment and one collection trip to Vian, OK in July 2011.

Introduction Overview: Phase I

The first phase of this research plan is the collection of the botanical specimen located in the southeastern part of Oklahoma State. Crosslin F. Smith who is the high medicine man (priest) of the Keetoowah Cherokees was born and raised in this region of Oklahoma and has been practicing the ethnomedicobotany of the Keetoowah Cherokees for over 40 decades. He is the grandson of Redbird Smith and son of Stokes Smith, who are recognized in the literature and by the tribes as the founder (Redbird) and Chiefs of the Keetoowah Night Hawk Society. Through this lineage the spiritual, herbal and practical practice was passed down to my Elder, Crosslin F. Smith. He is the mentor in the field who will be responsible for site location of the plants collected. Elder Smith will also be the grantor of the ethnomedical/botanical information on how the plants are used and applied in specific conditions. He is willing to share this information on the plants that are used to treat specific illnesses like cancer.

Dr. Noé collected in July 2011 museum quality specimen of one plant that is housed in the UBCNM Medicinal Plant Herbarium and preserved for the future of ethnomedicine discovery. The history of medicine and the current scientific quest for new treatments and cures leads directly to a project of this nature that would preserve a practice of indigenous medicine that will be lost with our elders. Dr. Noé has diligently spent her entire professional and personal life in the pursuit of preserving the ethnomedicobotany of the Cherokee. She has worked extensively with the Eastern Cherokee band, under the tutelage of elders Mary U. and G.B. Chiltoskey and 'Mama' Gene Jackson. The Eastern band led her to Elder Smith when she began to ask about the religious and spiritual practices of the medicine. For the past twenty five years she has been the student to Elder Smith's teachings and after the age of 50 has been considered a traditional Cherokee medicine woman. As a researcher and a physician, Dr. Noé feels that it is imperative that the further investigation of this medicine is accomplished. It has been shown through anecdotal outcomes that these indigenous ethnomedical practices have treated and possibly cured cancer in Elder Smith's practice. In medicine we are currently looking for new possibilities to battle cancer, we have looked to the South American rainforest and indigenous native practices, but we have neglected our own indigenous peoples and the practices that are still used today. It is time that we look in our own proverbial backyard, with the plant medicines and practices that have been used on our continent for over ten thousand years.

Medicinal Plant Herbarium: Located HSC 608



Dr. Noé showing students the new plant dryer in the new herbarium



Dr. Noé showing students the new herbarium specimen cabinet



Opening the collection plant press and showing students the research voucher specimen



Professor and students studying research voucher specimen with new herbarium equipment



Field Collection of Botanical Specimen



The Plant: A species of Milkweed



The Collection Habitat: Vian, OK



The collection and prep of the plants to make medicine by Elder Smith



The Roots: the medicinal parts used traditionally



The People: Elders Crosslin and Glenna Smith, daughter Cathy and Dr. Noé, July 2011

Conclusion The preservation of this ethnomedical information is priceless. This has been passed down in an oral tradition for tens of thousands of years, and has been passed down to Dr. Noé and continues to be a part of her life's work. The completion of this Phase I of the seed grant project is to properly identify and house the voucher specimen at the UBCNM Medicinal Plant Herbarium. Identification of the specimen are in process with the cooperation of the Herbarium Curator at one of Dr. Noé's *alma mater*, Old Dominion University. Rebecca Bray, PhD has graciously agreed to be a part of the research and assist in the identification of the specimen. Dr. Bray worked with Dr. Noé as an undergraduate and graduate student on this same project over 25 years ago. This is the first time the Elder Smith has allowed the collection of this particular plant. Once the plant is identified a scientific paper will be produced and published on Phase I. Phase II of this research design is the bioanalysis of the plant constituents for their bioactivity. Currently Elder Smith is in conversation with Cherokee Nation (OK) for sponsorship of the ongoing research.